



LAVRAS SCHOOL

BRAZIL

AS A MISSION FIELD



BY

S. H. CHESTER

Brazil as a Mission Field.

BY S. H. CHESTER.

IN sailing from New York to Rio de Janeiro the ship's track lies eastward about one thousand miles and then southward about thirty-six hundred miles. The greater part of this journey is through an ocean desert. It is very rarely that either ships or sea fowl or even flying fish are visible. A journey of about twenty days brings us to the harbor of Rio, the capital of the United States of South America.

After crossing the equator one observes that the Southern heavens are not so rich in constellations as the Northern. The Southern Cross is quite insignificant in comparison with the Great Dipper, which is still to be seen on the far Northern horizon, turned bottom upwards.

A BRAZILIAN CITY.

The Bay of Rio is enclosed in a circuit of about eighty miles of coast line, along the edge of which and running back in the gorges between the hills are the lines of houses which make up the city. They are all of the Latin style of architecture, exactly like the houses we see in Lisbon or in Naples. They are of stucco

walls with tiled roofs, and painted in all the colors of the rainbow. Many of them are adorned with a profusion of sculptured and bas-relief ornaments. The business streets are narrow, mean, and ill-smelling, and the pity is that so little fire is used that there is little hope of a "Chicago" conflagration to clear them out and make room for something more modern. The principal one is called the "Ouvidor," on which no vehicles are allowed except at specified hours, and which, in the afternoons, is always crowded with pedestrians, many of them very stylishly attired, some going on business errands and some conversing in the most animated style on the morning's proceedings of the National Congress.

The business houses and residences are intermingled. The balcony windows, which are the universal feature of domestic architecture, are always full of women leaning on their elbows observing and being observed. This phenomenon appears everywhere in Brazil, not only in large cities, but also in small towns and even in farmhouses in the country.

There are many beautiful gardens in Rio of tropical flowers and foliage plants, palms and grasses, and avenues of overarching bamboo. The municipality deserves credit for its efforts to beautify the city in this way. Almost every private residence that aspires to any degree of elegance is surrounded by a lovely flower garden.

By a cogwheel railway we ascend the Corcovado Mountain, from the top of which is to

be seen a panorama of mountains, bay, and city of indescribable beauty. The mountains rise precipitously in all manner of quaint shapes, many of them being needle pointed and others like a sugar loaf. These, with the crystal waters of the bay, the houses in their bright colors, the gardens in their tropical luxuriance of foliage, and, above all, the sky at sunset, with such brilliancy of such varied and ever-changing hues, altogether make a scene to fill the soul of a painter with ecstasy and despair. Not all the cities of Brazil possess this wealth of natural advantages; but most of the larger cities on the coast present an attractive and picturesque appearance. The city of Sao Paulo has been built up since the development of the coffee industry, and is much more modern and progressive in all respects than Rio de Janeiro. It has handsome stores, strong banks, comparatively wide and well-paved streets, and trolley cars managed by the same people who run the lines on Broadway, New York.

A well-to-do Brazilian is very particular as to what is on the inside of his yard enclosure, but is sublimely indifferent as to what is on the outside. The wealthiest man in Bahia has a palatial mansion in the midst of a lovely garden enclosed by a tall iron fence. He owns a large area of land contiguous to his dwelling, from the rental of which he derives his income. I noticed that this ground was covered with a large number of very small and very dirty hovels, evidently occupied by very poor people. The plot of ground immediately adjoining his

yard fence he had rented out for stock yards. The city of Bahia, however, is not to be taken as, in all respects, typical of Brazil. The great majority of its population are negroes, many of whose ancestors only two generations back were native Africans.

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY.

The Amazon River and other general features of the physical geography of Brazil are familiar and well known. One very remarkable feature of it was unknown to me, and I have only seen it referred to in a book on Brazil written by Prof. Louis Agassiz. It is that very nearly the whole surface of Brazil is covered by the same character of top soil. This soil is a dark-red clay mingled with gravel. Professor Agassiz pronounced it to be a glacial drift—a sort of paste spread over the surface of the country when, some time back in the geological past, a great glacier slid down from the sides of Andes into the Atlantic Ocean. The stratum has an average thickness of several feet, and, like all glacial drift soil, is fertile and productive. It produces an abundant food supply for the present population with the most superficial kind of cultivation. In Northern Brazil the elevation of the land near the eastern coast causes a precipitation of moisture before the ocean breeze travels far into the interior. In consequence of this, the country is subject to droughts, severe and long protracted, during which the people are obliged to leave home and come toward the coast in

search of food. With this exception, which perhaps does not include more than one-sixth of the total area of the country, the capacity of the land for supporting population must be much larger than that of the United States of North America. The cotton plant grows indefinitely without renewing until it becomes a tree, and for the first three years yields abundantly. The ravages of insects, however, have greatly interfered with the production of cotton. There are immense coffee plantations which formerly yielded very handsome profits. In recent years the imposition of foolish export duties has almost destroyed the profits of coffee raising. There is no finer quality of coffee than the best grade of well-seasoned Rio. The coffee which the Brazilians give you in their homes is as good as any that the traveler will find in France or Italy. The poor reputation of Rio coffee is due to the fact that so much of it has been used in this country in an unseasoned state. It is said that some of the famed Mocha coffee of Constantinople grows on Brazilian coffee plants. The small round grains which grow one in a pod are separated from the flat grains and sent to Aden, in Arabia, where they are put up in bags of Arabian cloth and shipped all over the world as Mocha coffee. The valleys produce abundantly of sugar cane and rice and beans and mandioca with almost no cultivation after the seeds are once planted. A large variety of tropical bread fruits contribute to the food supply. The grass

on the hills furnishes pasture the year round for innumerable cattle.

The climate of Southern Brazil in the winter season is Edenic as far south as Sao Paulo. There is occasional frost enough to blacken tender leaves, but not enough to kill the greater part of the vegetation. Twenty-five out of thirty days which I spent in the States of Sao Paulo and Minas Geras reminded me continually of George Herbert's lines:

"Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright;
The bridal of the earth and sky."

DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY.

Although the first European colonist came to Brazil about the same time that the Pilgrim fathers came to North America, the resources of that splendid country are as yet almost wholly undeveloped. Instead of the 80,000,000 people who inhabit the States of North America, the last census gave Brazil a population of less than 20,000,000. There are places where gold nuggets are found lying about on the surface of the ground, and many places where good wages could be made washing the sand in the streams for gold, and yet gold mining is carried on to a very limited extent. There are railroads connecting most of the larger cities near the coast, and two or three that penetrate the interior for several hundred miles. These roads have been built chiefly by English capital, and are only the beginning of what is necessary to furnish trans-

portation for the people and the products of the soil. Interior transportation is chiefly done on two-wheeled wagons, whose screeching wooden axles announce their approach for miles before they come in sight, pulled by ox teams over roads which are simply gullies that have been dug by the wagon wheels in the soft, gravelly soil. The transportation of his farm produce by this means costs the farmer almost as much as he can get for it when he reaches the market. It is no wonder, therefore, that Brazilian trade plays such a relatively insignificant part in the world's commerce as it does to-day. There are some very delightful and hospitable homes among the well-to-do of the rural population. The great majority of the farmhouses, however, that one passes are of the most primitive character in the matter of style and appointment.

GOVERNMENT.

One reason for this slow development is perhaps the semi-tropical climate, which is not conducive to energy and enterprise. The necessities of life being so easy of attainment has a tendency to make the people satisfied merely to obtain these without thinking very much about the progress of the country. Another reason is the form of government which the first colonists brought with them from Portugal. The line of emperors culminating in the last Dom Pedro were mostly men of high character. Dom Pedro himself was a man of benevolent disposition and commendable public spirit.

He was not a very strong character, however, and was always surrounded by a very numerous body of officials who administered the government mainly in their own personal interest and always on the principle of killing the goose that lays the golden egg. In 1889 the imperial government was overthrown and a republic was set up whose constitution was modeled very closely after that of the United States of North America. The Brazilians, however, obtained their free institutions without having had any previous training in the art of administering them and without paying any price for them either of blood or treasure. The mutiny of a few regiments one night at the capitol was the only public disturbance attending the change of government. Since the republic was established, the same officials or their immediate descendants have been in power, with no good Dom Pedro to guide and restrain them. The National Congress has been almost wholly under their influence. Their principal idea seems to have been to obtain government revenue rather than to legislate for the general prosperity of the country. They impose no tax on land, making it easy for the old and wealthy families to hold very large bodies of it without expense, thereby preventing the occupation of it by those who would develop and utilize it. They impose a tax of 6 per cent on all property passing from one hand to another, thus attaching a penalty to the transaction of real estate business. When our government removed the tariff on Brazilian coffee, which

had almost paralyzed that industry, instead of allowing the coffee planter to enjoy the prosperity which would have come to him and thereby securing the general prosperity of the country, they imposed an export tax of about the same amount, thus securing large government revenues, but destroying the prosperity of all that part of Brazil of which coffee is the principal staple. Their financial legislation has resulted in fluctuations in the value of their standard coin, the *milreis*, which have reduced almost all business to a guessing basis. During the last ten years the value of this coin in gold has ranged from 12½ cents to 45 cents. Its par value is 54 cents.

RELIGION.

The chief reason of all why Brazil has not kept pace with this country in its development is unquestionably to be found in the fact that, until about forty years ago, the Roman Catholic Church had uninterrupted sway over the people. This leads us to the topic of Brazil as a mission field. Is it not already a Christian country? And even though we may regard the form of Christianity prevailing there as less perfect than ours, is it generous and liberal-minded in us to be sending missionaries to this Christian country?

It is not my purpose in speaking of Brazil as a mission field to denounce Roman Catholicism in the abstract. I believe that church to be, wherever found, a corrupted form of Christianity. We must also recognize the fact that

many of the saints of God are to be found within its pale. I shall speak only of that type of Roman Catholicism which is found in Brazil, and shall not say anything of it more severe than the Pope himself has said in numerous encyclical letters addressed to the South American clergy, pointing out their shortcomings and pleading for reforms.

If Christianity consisted in names and externals, Brazil would perhaps be the most Christian country in the world. Every village has its large wooden cross erected on the tallest neighboring hill, which is supposed to give its Christian character to the village. Every large farm has a church as a part of its equipment. *Padres* are thick in the streets of every city, and from a hill in Sao Joao de 'l Rey, a city of about ten thousand people, I counted the spires of thirteen large churches, besides a multitude of chapels and shrines. Religious festivals are so numerous that they seriously interfere with the transaction of business. They are held frequently throughout the year, sometimes lasting a week, and the cost of the fireworks and other things used in connection with them amounts up to the thousands of dollars. At least one-half of the male children are named after one or another of the twelve apostles or of some saint in the Roman calendar. A large proportion of the towns and villages have scriptural names. A saloon in the city of Rio, having the usual spectacular display of bottles in its front window, had the name written above

the door: "The Restaurant of the Children of Heaven."

When we come to the realities, however, that should correspond to these names, we find a condition of things that is as nearly as possible the exact opposite of what the names would imply. Professor Agassiz, who was by no means prejudiced against Roman Catholicism, after three years' observation of the Brazilian priesthood, says of them: "Their ignorance is patent; their character, most corrupt; and their influence, deep seated and powerful." For them to marry would be contrary to the canons of the church and would lead to their deposition. It does not interfere, however, with their official standing when, as many of them do, they live in open concubinage. I was struck with the similarity of the relation to the people of many of the Romish priests in Brazil to that of the Buddhist priesthood in China and Japan. They are considered necessary in connection with certain functions and occasions in the life of the people. They must be on hand to perform the marriage ceremony, to administer extreme unction to the dying, to bury the dead, and to absolve those whose consciences trouble them on account of their crimes. Apart from these official functions, the best people have no use for them, and they are perhaps the most disreputable element in the communities where they reside.

There is a class of people in Brazil, representing the old aristocracy, who are highly educated, who have elegant homes in which they

dispense charming hospitality, and who are unsurpassed in all the arts and amenities of social life. Many of them are attached outwardly to the Romish Church because it is respectable to be so, but most of them have long ago become disgusted with the ignorance and superstition which are the most obtrusive features in the life of both priesthood and church, and have become either French Positivists and Materialists, or have reacted to the opposite extreme and become Spiritualists.

So far as the common people are concerned, the Romish Church, which had exclusive control of educational matters for nearly three hundred years, brought less than 10 per cent of them to the intellectual plane of being able to read and write. Religiously, the ignorant masses are what they could not help from being under the tuition of such a priesthood as the one described above. Even if the people could read the Bible, it is a forbidden book, and the public burning of Bibles by the priests in the streets is still a common occurrence. Under the empire, the priests had a monopoly of celebrating marriage, and were so exorbitant in their charges that many poor people were forced either to live in celibacy or to forego the sanction of the marriage bond. Some of the superstitious rites practiced by the people are too gross and revolting to be described. The Christ whom they worship is the dead Christ. The Virgin Mary is the one to whom they look as a Saviour. Images of God the Father are paraded before the people. I saw at Lavras a

company of very black Africans, in gaudy array, bearing banners with doves embroidered on them, beating tambourines and performing dances similar to those that may now be seen in the villages of Central Africa. This procession was supposed to be in honor of the Holy Spirit. Images of the Virgin and the saints are scattered along the highways, where their shrines are visited and enriched by the deluded people. Under the empire there was an idol in the city of Bahia which bore the name of General St. Antony. The idol was regularly commissioned and received a general's salary from the government. This salary, of course, was handled by the priest who kept charge of the idol. About twelve miles out from Pernambuco, on the railroad, I passed a large farm owned by Sr. Alho, a lawyer in the city. It was equipped with all the buildings and machinery pertaining to a first-class farm, including a church, but the land was not in cultivation, and all the buildings were in ruins except the dwelling and the church, which were in excellent repair. The explanation was that, some time previously, Sr. Alho obtained possession of a human skeleton, which he succeeded in persuading the people was that of a person formerly known in that region as St. Severino. He had the skeleton stuffed and covered with leather and set it up in the church as an object of worship. St. Severino proved to be a miracle worker, whose benefits in the way of bringing about happy issues of things in general were in proportion to the value of

the votive offerings made at his shrine. The income derived from this source belonged to Sr. Alho and proved so handsome that he found himself able to live on it comfortably in the city without the trouble of working his farm. This is not at all an extreme illustration of the degradation to which the so-called Christianity of Brazil has come. Wherever such superstitions prevail, whether they have attached to them the name of Christian or pagan, we find a proper field for the missionary operations of our Protestant Christendom.

MISSION WORK.

The laws of Brazil guaranteeing religious liberty are all that could be desired. The execution of those laws, however, especially in places remote from the seat of government, is often very difficult. Such is the fanaticism of the people, stirred up as it often is by the local priest, that a Protestant missionary goes into a locality in the interior of Brazil where enlightenment has not yet penetrated at the peril of his life. One of the features of Brazilian social life, brought over from Portugal in the sixteenth century, was the professional assassin. Organized bands of these are still to be found in many places, which are usually in the service of the political leader of the locality, who protects them from the law and protects from them whom he chooses, and uses them to remove inconvenient obstructions in the way of his political ambition. These bands have proven ready instruments in the hands of fanat-

ical priests in their work of opposing the introduction of Protestantism. Only a few years ago one of our missionaries in the town of Conhotinho, about one hundred miles in the interior from the city of Recife, was assaulted in the street by one of these assassins. He would have been killed had not a native minister riding by his side interposed his own person and received the assassin's dagger in his own heart. Riotous demonstrations have been made in many other places when missionaries have attempted to open work where it had not previously been done. The people of Brazil, however, when once they have given ear to the gospel message, have proven remarkably responsive to it, and the work of the Presbyterians in Brazil has had a more rapid development than in any other of our foreign mission fields.

The first Presbyterian foreign missionary work ever undertaken was the sending out of two ministers and fourteen students by John Calvin and the Genevan clergy to an island in the harbor of Rio de Janeiro. After a few years of successful work this missionary party was murdered, and those who had adhered to them were scattered by persecution.

All the principal Protestant denominations of this country are working in Brazil. The two largest missions are those of the Methodists and the Presbyterians. The Methodists were late in beginning their work, not arriving on the field until 1876. They have carried it on with characteristic aggressiveness, and have

wisely devoted much of their energy and means to the development of a native ministry. They have a well-established college and theological seminary at Juiz de Fora, and have gathered about three thousand communicants into the church. The Northern Presbyterian Church began work in 1859. The first Presbyterian Church was organized in 1862. McKenzie College, at Sao Paulo, has excellent buildings, a fairly good endowment, and about five hundred students in attendance. In 1869 the Southern Presbyterian Church began work in Campinas, in the Province of Sao Paulo. The first missionaries organized *The International College of Campinas* and conducted a successful school at that point for about twenty years. Owing to successive visitations of yellow fever, this school was finally abandoned, and the Campinas mission was transferred to Lavras, in the State of Minas. At this point a very successful girls' school and also an Industrial School for Boys has been established. At Campinas a marsh at the base of the hill on which the city is built, which was the breeding ground for yellow fever germs, has been cleared and drained and a beautiful stream of clear water now runs through it with grassy meadow banks. A supply of good water has been brought down from the hills and the very best modern system of sanitation adopted. There has been no epidemic of fever for several years, and it is not believed that there can be any more of such a malignant type as those which formerly prevailed on account of local causes which have

now been removed. The school building at Campinas was recently purchased by the Synod, and the Theological Seminary formerly conducted at Sao Paulo is now conducted there.

A training school for native candidates for the ministry is also being conducted at Garanhuns, in North Brazil. The plan of our church and of the Northern Presbyterian Church, which works in coöperation with us, is to develop a number of schools which shall be feeders to one higher school where Protestant young men can receive professional training and where the future ministry and leaders of the Presbyterian Church in Brazil may receive a training based on Protestant instead of Jesuit ethics. The educational work carried on by Protestants in Brazil has furnished the model on which the whole system of public education is now being conducted.

Our Brazilian Christians have shown a most commendable spirit of liberality, and have developed rapidly in the direction of self-support. In nearly all the cities and larger towns comfortable church buildings have been erected almost entirely by native contributions. The Presbyterian Church at Rio has a nice stone building and comfortable manse and gives an ample support to its own pastor, who is a man of learning and eloquence. In the year 1901 three members of this congregation contributed \$6,000 to the benevolent operations of the church. A theological seminary building costing \$25,000 has been erected at Sao Paulo. The money for this building came entirely from the

native church. At present there are not less than ten thousand communicants in the Synod of Brazil. The church is organized with its regular Boards of Home and Foreign Missions.

In 1903 there was a division in the church. The pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Sao Paulo undertook to induce the Synod to make membership in the order of Free Masons a bar to communion. Failing to carry his point in the Synod, he seceded, and with six other native ministers and seven ruling elders set up the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil. What will be the final result of this unfortunate occurrence cannot yet be foreseen. It is not impossible that it may result in greater activity in both branches of the native church and the more rapid evangelization of the country.

If all our foreign missionaries should now retire from Brazil, leaving the native church to its own resources, it is sufficiently well established to maintain itself, and would both live and grow. The aim which we have in view in all foreign missionary work—namely, the establishment of a self-governing and self-propagating church—has been to this extent attained in Brazil. That church, however, will need our help for perhaps another quarter of a century in order to carry on successfully the immense evangelistic work which remains to be done before Protestantism attains the place which it ought to hold in Brazil. Especially will our help be needed in furnishing for the Brazilian church an adequate supply of prop-

erly trained and qualified native ministers, elders, and leaders. Furnished with these, the Presbyterian Church of Brazil will be ready to take its place among the strong and well-organized forces that are working together in the great effort to evangelize the world in this generation.

Executive Committee Foreign Missions
Presbyterian Church, U. S.
Nashville, Tenn.

1M-11-10